

4475. k. 8.
1-18

*The indispensible duty of contending for the Faith,
which was once delivered unto the Saints.*

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

ON

SUNDAY *June 29, 1766.*

BEING

COMMENCEMENT-SUNDAY.

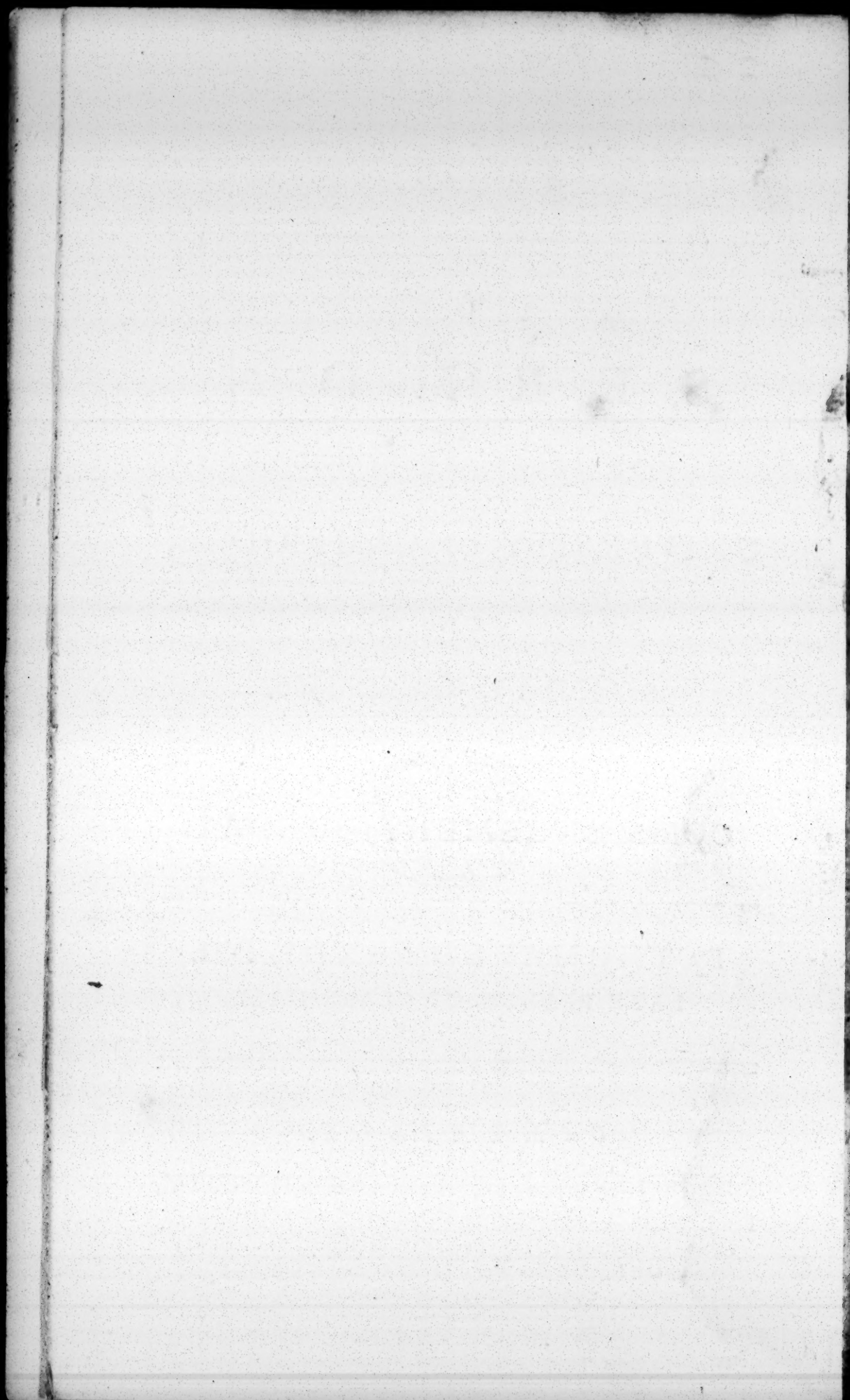
By THOMAS EDWARDS, D.D.

LATE FELLOW OF CLARE-HALL.

C A M B R I D G E :

Printed by J. ARCHDEACON, Printer to the UNIVERSITY,
For J. WOODYER, in Cambridge; and sold by J. BEECROFT,
Pater-noster-Row, J. DODSLEY, Pall-Mall, and T. CADELL,
in the Strand, London; D. PRINCE, at Oxford;
and W. CHASE, at Norwich.

M. DCC. LXXIII.



S E R M O N.

JUDE x. 3.

BELoved, WHEN I GAVE ALL DILIGENCE TO WRITE UNTO YOU OF THE COMMON SALVATION, IT WAS NEEDFUL FOR ME TO WRITE UNTO YOU, AND TO EXHORT YOU, THAT YE SHOULD EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH, WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS.

THE supreme excellency and worth of the christian religion, as we find it in the sacred writings, pure and unadulterated, cannot but appear to every virtuous and unprejudiced mind, to every candid and impartial searcher after truth. It gives us the most sublime and elevated notions of the being, attributes, and providence of the one true God; and directs us to pay such adoration to Him, as is entirely consonant to His infinite perfections, and naturally flows from the consideration of His immaterial and spiritual nature:

B

ture: We are to *worship Him*, not with the outward show and ostentation of hypocrisy, the empty ceremonies and foppish pageantry of superstition, or the irrational fervors and transports of enthusiasm, but *in spirit and in truth*.* — It communicates the most just and refined sentiments concerning the nature and obligations of social virtue; and recommends the strict and conscientious discharge of all those duties, which arise from the social character of man, and the several natural relations we stand in to one another: And what must by no means be passed over, — It in a very particular manner enjoins us to cultivate with the utmost diligence, the truly noble and god-like principle of an unlimited universal benevolence; and thus leads us to the imitation of the FIRST and BEST of all beings, whose *tender mercies are over all His works*. — Nor is it wanting in laying down the most pure and exalted precepts for the due regulation and management of the appetites and passions; for the constant preservation and maintenance of such a scheme of self-government, as will most effectually promote our own peace and happiness, and enable us to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the great excellency and dignity of reasonable beings. — And to compleat the glorious system, LIFE AND IM-

MOR-

* John iv. 24.

MORTALITY have been brought to light through the gospel:† Assurance has been given unto all men, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a future state of existence; when the rational powers will be enlarged, the pleasures and entertainments of the mind will be more refined and exalted, and the human nature will appear in its highest lustre and perfection.

It cannot therefore but be matter of sorrowful reflection to every sincere lover of truth, and real friend to the religion of Christ, that so very excellent an institution, which was designed to inspire men with the most just and worthy conceptions concerning the nature and perfections of the Supreme Being, — to advance the general interests and happiness of civil society, — and to give inward serenity and peace of mind to each individual; — which was calculated to make us truly pious and virtuous, and in consequence of that, truly happy and blessed both here and hereafter; — It cannot but be matter of sorrowful reflection to us, I say, that such an excellent institution should very soon after its first promulgation, through the stupid ignorance and foolish prejudices of some, and the self-interested views and sinister designs of others, be misrepresented and corrupted; and that it should continue to be thus mis-

† 2 Tim. i. 10.

misrepresented and corrupted, in a greater or less degree, through every succeeding age down to the present times. But however melancholy the consideration, so the fact stands. The simplicity and purity of the principles and doctrines of christianity have been adulterated and polluted by heterogeneous unnatural admixtures of GENTILE PHILOSOPHY, of MYSTIC THEOLOGY, of SCHOLASTIC JARGON, of POPISH SUPERSTITION, and CALVINISTICAL ENTHUSIASM.

What inconsiderate and ungrateful creatures are the sons of men! How prone are they to abuse the best gifts of heaven! — The Deity in his infinite benevolence, *communicated to them* the inestimable blessing of *the gospel*, that it might point out to them the road of their duty and happiness; that it might be *a lantern unto their feet, and a light unto their paths*. But they have wickedly prostituted it to the vilest purposes; they have introduced and established the most monstrous misrepresentations, and the most horrid perversions of its sacred doctrines.

Though the religion of the blessed Jesus is emphatically a religion of truth, yet has it been made to patronize the grossest errors: — Though it is emphatically a religion of peace, yet has it been made to promote discord and variance, violence and bloodshed: — Though
it

it breathes nothing but humility and meekness, yet has it been made to countenance and support ambition and tyranny : — and — Though its natural tendency is to inspire its professors with the highest degrees of humanity and benevolence, with every social tender virtue, yet has it been made to authorize, and give a sanction to the most unheard of cruelty, oppression, and persecution.†

Saint Jude exhorted the Jewish converts || *earnestly to contend * for the faith, which was once † delivered unto the saints.* This, in truth, has been a duty of the highest obligation and importance in

† It has however, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, effected a very considerable reformation both in the religious notions, and moral behaviour of mankind; as every one must see and acknowledge, who compares the opinions and practices of the antient gentile world with those of modern christian countries, where the gospel is professed in any tolerable degree of purity: And had it always had fair play given it, and been suffered to operate according to its own real nature and genius, freely and without restraint, its reforming and salutary influence would have been much more efficacious and extensive, and its effects the noblest and best, that can be produced in the rational creation; — a pure uncorrupted piety, — a disinterested universal benevolence, — a strict inviolable self-government.

|| See Dr. Benson's *History of St. Jude, and of his writing his epistle*, prefixed to the paraphrase and notes: p. 437. — 448. Edit. 2.

* “ — The word *παραινέσθαι* signifies *to strive*, as “ they did for victory, in the *agonistic games*.” — *Benson* in loc.

† “ — *Ἀπὸ* signifies *fully, or perfectly*.” — *Idem*. See too *Glassius's Philolog. Sac.* lib. 3. tract. 5. can. 14. p. 455. Amst. 1711.

in every age of the christian church. And it is most manifestly so in the present times: The corruptions and abuses of pure and genuine christianity, which are taught and practised in the Romish communion, are beyond expression enormous and horrible:* and many of the doctrines of the first reformers, are to the last degree extravagant and absurd; they stand in diametrical opposition to every dictate of reason, and the whole tenor of divine revelation.

The faith here, as in other places, is put objectively for the christian doctrines. And as we must first know what the christian doctrines are, before we can *contend* for them, so we must search after them in the writings of the new testament: For THERE, and THERE ONLY, are they to be found uncorrupted and unadulterated; in their native simplicity and purity; such as they were originally proposed to

* A celebrated writer makes the following just and animated reflections on the nature and genius of the Romish religion: " — A religion, the fundamental principle of which is ignorance and implicit faith; a religion, which is a contradiction to reason, its doctrines incredible, and its worship the very dregs of pagan superstition and enthusiasm; a religion, which by its compensations for moral guilt, by its ridiculous and slight penances, soothes and encourages the licentious passions of human nature; a religion intirely calculated for the advancement of priestly power and grandeur; a religion founded in fraud and imposition, and propagated by violence and blood." See the first of the four Sermons at the end of *Dr. Foster's Discourses on Natural Religion and Social Virtue: Vol I.* P. 343.

to mankind by the first great preachers and publishers of them, Christ and his Apostles.

The christian doctrines were at first delivered by word of mouth. Afterwards the apostles committed them to writing for the use both of the first converts, and of the christians of all succeeding ages. The writings of the apostles have accordingly been transmitted down to our times; and they have descended to us in every great essential both of faith and practice, of doctrine and of duty, in their original integrity and primitive purity.* HERE then undoubtedly we are to seek *the truth, as it is in Jesus*: HERE we are to look for *the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints*.

But lest we mistake the spurious flimsy doctrines of a meer human system for the genuine and substantial truths of a divine revelation, it will be indispensably necessary, and of the utmost consequence and importance, that we come to the reading of the sacred books with minds entirely divested of all prejudice and partiality in favor of any particular sentiments in religion. Bigotted preconceived opinions in every kind of study, will of course stop up the passages, and block up the avenues, where truth

* This, I hope, has been sufficiently shewn in the first of the Latin Dissertations. But see too the learned and ingenious Dr. *Harwood's* New Introduction to the Study and Knowledge of the New-Testament: Vol. 1. chap. 3.

truth should enter.* Forgetting therefore all theological systems, and banishing all prejudicate notions, we should study the new testament with freedom and impartiality, and interpret it, as we would any other antient book, by the dictates of good sense, and according to the established canons of learned and rational criticism.†

He that is previously biassed in favor of this or that particular opinion, or attached to this or that system of theology, will be too apt to press scripture into its service; too forward to make the certain unerring doctrines of the gospel yield and give way to the uncertain erroneous decisions of frail fallible men. And thus a meer human scheme of faith, and not the word of God, will be preposterously made the test and criterion of truth.

To little purpose then shall we seek the genuine doctrines of Christ in the sacred oracles, if, instead of fetching our tenets from thence, we

* See English Dissertations: p. 80, 81. 22, 23.

† To interpret the New Testament, at least the more difficult parts of it, with accuracy and exactness, a man ought to be a good Hebræist, a thorough Grecian, and a thorough Critic. And yet numbers think themselves well qualified for the undertaking, who are neither Hebræists, — nor Grecians, — nor Critics.

“Sola scripturarum ars est, says *Jerome*, quam sibi omnes passim vendicant: Hanc GARRULA ANUS, — Hanc DELIRUS SENEX, — Hanc SOPHISTA VERBOSUS, — Hanc UNIVERSI — presumunt, lacerant, docent, antequam discant.” Dr. *Fortin* remarks, “What would he say,

“*Si foret hoc nostrum fato dilatus in ævum?*”

we take them with us thither ; and instead of letting the plain and obvious meaning of scripture determine our opinions, we suffer our opinions to determine the meaning of scripture. And yet this, as is well known, is the too general practice of christians of all denominations. They indeed profess to make the new testament the sole rule of their faith ; but, upon examination, it will too often be found an empty profession, and an unmeaning compliment, which they pay to the word of God. The several systems, they have been brought up and educated in, are the great standards of their belief. Enamoured with these they read the Bible under the influence of the strongest prepossessions ; not to find out the real sense of revelation, but to make revelation speak their own sense ; not to accommodate their notions to scripture, but, in the best manner they can, scripture to the notions, they have already embraced : And thus violent unnatural constructions are put upon the clearest passages ; texts are unmercifully strained, tortured, and wrested from their obvious undoubted meaning, and forced and *compelled to come in*, to prop up and support the tottering baseless fabric of a visionary hypothesis ; the plain intelligible principles of the gospel are wrapped up in darkness and mystery ; and absurdity and nonsense are fathered upon the word of God.

To get at *the knowledge of the truth* then, we must *search* the sacred oracles; and with honest and candid, with open and liberal minds, endeavour to discover the true genuine meaning and import of what is there revealed to us. Thus conducted our enquiries will not end in disappointment: If we thus ingenuously seek the truth, we shall not seek it in vain: By free impartial disquisition we shall know what those pure uncorrupted doctrines are, *which were once delivered unto the saints.* ——— And when we thus know them, it will be our duty, our indispensable duty, *earnestly to contend for them:* — *to contend for them*, I say, against ALL OPPOSITION:

—Against those,—Who enslaved by superstition and bigotry, or actuated by self-interested and worldly views, are for obtruding upon mankind the adulterate heterodox doctrines of human systems, instead of laying before them the pure orthodox principles of the christian institution:—Who are for making them drink at the polluted streams of imposture and error, instead of leading them to the *crystal waters of life* and truth:—Who are for retaining, not removing the *wood, hay, stubble*; nor carefully separating them from the *gold, silver, and precious stones*: — Who will neither take the *fan in hand* themselves, to sever the *chaff* from the *wheat*, and thoroughly to purge the floor, nor,

as

as far as their power and influence extend, suffer others to do it: — To speak without metaphor, — Who are professed enemies to all reformation in religion, and would have christians rigidly adhere to the opinions of their fore-fathers, whether true or false, right or wrong: — Who are for maintaining at all events what is established in the particular country, or religious society they belong to, and for having the wisdom of past ages serve for all succeeding ones: — Who would gladly check the progress of every free, though serious, and very interesting enquiry: — Who would have all new discoveries, though founded upon the solid and immoveable basis of truth, and of the utmost consequence and importance, diligently suppressed, and a stop put to all farther improvements in religious and scriptural knowledge.

In opposition to such unworthy professors of Christ's religion, must we *strive for the uncorrupted faith of the gospel*: and as champions in our great Master's cause, we must exert the utmost resolution and fortitude; neither dispirited and disheartened by the bitterest invectives of obloquy and reproach, nor terrified and affrighted, should such be our fate, by the fury and violence of persecution: *Who-soever shall confess me before men*, says the divine Author of our religion, HIM WILL I CONFESS

ALSO

ALSO *before my Father, which is in heaven: But whosoever shall deny me before men, HIM WILL I ALSO DENY before my Father which is in heaven.**

And as we ought to contend for the simplicity and purity of *the christian faith*, when it is corrupted, so ought we with equal zeal and spirit to defend it, when represented as a cheat and imposture; as the spurious production of priest-craft and state-policy combined together to keep the world in awe.

And here we are to stand forth in its vindication against another kind of adversaries: —

—Against those, — Whose bad morals and dissolute lives lead them to wish, that all religion were false, and that vice and virtue were but empty names: — Who leave no means untried to undermine the fundamental principles of the religion of nature, as well as of the religion of Christ, and to introduce an unrestrained licentiousness of manners: — Who have taken great pains to set aside the moral attributes of the Deity; — to explode the notion of a providence; — to invalidate the obligations of virtue; — to discredit the belief of a future state of rewards and punishments; — and thus — to degrade and sink the human species to a level with *the beasts that perish*: — Who love darkness rather than light, because their
deeds

† *Mat. x. 32, 33.*

deeds are evil: — Who are against christianity, because christianity is against them: — Who are disingenuous and unfair enough to charge it with the mistaken opinions of its professors, it NO WHERE DELIVERS; and with their bad practices, it EVERY WHERE CONDEMNS: — Who reason from their misapplications, and not from its OWN GENUINE TENDENCY: — Who draw arguments from passages, which they either misunderstand, or wilfully misinterpret: — and — Who, to cloak and conceal their real motives and designs, screen themselves under the specious title of free-thinkers.

We are however to take especial care, that when we *strive* for the genuine doctrines of the gospel, we *strive lawfully*. Whether we *contend* against those, who corrupt them, or those, who reject them, — we are to use no weapons in the conflict, but good arguments, strengthened and enforced by our good lives. He alone consults the real honor and credit of the pure religion of Christ, who endeavours to recommend it to the reason and understanding, the approbation and esteem of mankind, from convincing them of its truth and divinity by solid argumentation; and of its great usefulness and excellency by the irreproachable innocence, benevolence, and integrity of his own conduct. This is the plan,
which

which the best and most successful defenders of the christian institution have pursued: These are the means, by which they have proved and demonstrated it to be the offspring of heaven; — that *wisdom from above*, the direct tendency of which is to advance the glory of God, and the perfection and dignity of human nature; — *which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.**

But, instead of answering objections, to load the objectors with opprobrious names, — instead of *instructing in meekness those, that oppose themselves*, to send them for conviction to the civil magistrate in this world, or to consign them over to the vengeance of God in the next, — by such proceedings we should offer the highest indignity to the christian revelation, and imprudently become its adversaries, whilst we mean to be its friends. Angry and violent measures must be left to those, who are zealous for *the doctrines of men*, for *the faith* of after ages, for principles, which will most effectually serve the purposes of ambition and self-interest. We are to *contend* for the doctrines of Christ, for *the primitive faith, which was once delivered unto the saints*, by sound reasoning, and holy living.— By these expedients

we

* James iii. 17.

we are to vindicate *the truth, as it is in Jesus*, and to bring respect and honor to his divine religion.

Let us then, as sincere advocates for the christian system, defend it by clear cogent argumentation, and adorn it by a worthy laudable example: — Let us REASON for it, and LIVE for it: — Let there be no inconsistency between our manners on the one hand, and our defences on the other: — but — Let us by a diligent cultivation of that exalted piety and virtue the gospel recommends, by a steady uniform attachment to every religious and moral duty, shew ourselves real believers in the heavenly origin, and superlative excellency of that revelation, the unfeigned belief of which we would establish in the minds of others: — In one word, — Let us do all that lies in our power to promote the knowledge and practice of the pure gospel of Christ; and not only wish and pray, but exert our utmost endeavours, that his *kingdom may come*, and, in the strictest conformity to his divine precepts, *God's will may be done upon earth, as it is in heaven.*



Published by the same Author,

A *New English Translation of the Psalms* from the original Hebrew, reduced to metre by the late Bp. *Hare*; with Notes critical and explanatory; Illustrations of many passages, drawn from the Classics; and a preliminary Dissertation, in which the truth and certainty of that learned Prelate's happy Discovery is stated and proved. Printed for *B. Dod* in Ave-Mary Lane, London. 8vo.

A Sermon preached at St. Michael's in Coventry, Feb. 6. 1756.

The Doctrine of Irresistible Grace proved to have no foundation in the Writings of the New Testament. Printed for *J. Johnson* in Pater-noster-Row. 8vo.

Prolegomena in Libros Veteris Testamenti Poeticos; five Dissertation, in qua eruditissimi viri *Francisci Harii*, nuper Episcopi Cicestriensis, de antiqua Hebræorum Poesi Hypothesin ratione et veritate niti, fusc ostenditur; atque ad Objecta quædam respondetur. Subjicitur Metricæ Lowthianæ Constatutio, cum Indicibus necessariis. Prostant apud *J. Woodyer*, Cantab. *J. Fletcher*, Oxon. et *J. Johnson*, Londin. in vico dicto Pater-noster Row. 8vo.

Epistola ad doctissimum Virum Robertum Lowthium, S. T. P. In qua nonnulla, quæ ad nuperæ suæ de Sacra Hebræorum Poesi Prælectionum Editionis calcem habet, expenduntur. Prostant apud *J. Woodyer*, Cantab. *J. Fletcher*, Oxon. et *J. Johnson*, Londin. in vico vulgo dicto Pater-noster Row. 8vo.

Two Dissertations: The first on the Absurdity and Injustice of Religious Bigotry and Persecution; their Utter Contrariety to the temper and conduct of Christ and his Apostles; and their Mischievous and Fatal Consequences: The second on the Principal Qualifications and Canons, necessary for the Right and Accurate Interpretation of the New Testament. With a Postscript. Printed for *J. Woodyer* in Cambridge, and *J. Johnson* in London. 8vo.

Duæ Dissertationes: In quarum priore probatur, Variantes Lectiones et Menda, quæ in Sacram Scripturam irreperunt, non labefactare ejus Auctoritatem in rebus, quæ ad Fidem et Mores pertinent: In posteriore vero, Prædestinationem *Paulinam* ad Gentilium Vocationem totam spectare. Prostant apud *J. Woodyer* Cantab. et *J. Beecroft*, *T. Payne*, et *M. Hingeston*, Londin.

Preparing for the Press,

Selecta quædam *Theocriti* Idyllia, Nova Latina Versione donata, et Notis, tum Variorum, tum suis, illustrata

A THOMA EDWARDS, S. T. P.

Aul. Clar. Cantab. nuper Socio.

